

## **Series: I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist**

### **Lesson 4: "There was a Man Named Jesus"**

**\*Announcements, encouragement to invite people and opening prayer.**



**Connect:** an opportunity for people to immediately interact and connect with each other; icebreaker/attention getters. **Icebreaker:** How do you know there was a man who lived named Tiberius Caesar? Have you seen a photo of him? Have you talked to anyone who met him?

*(There were no photos. You know because people made statues. You know because alleged eyewitnesses recorded facts about his life. You base your belief on evidence that you assume is true because it is fairly exhaustive.)*

Who else or what else existed that you believe is true but has only partial evidence that cannot be thoroughly proven?

**Transition:** We take many things to be true based on evidence far less substantial than the literal existence of a man named Jesus who lived and died in the first century A.D.

**Bottom Line:** I believe the evidence proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that a man named Jesus lived and died during the time the Bible declares. The only question remaining is who this Jesus truly was.

#### **LESSON PLAN**

##### **Read Isaiah 7:10-14**

1. What sign was given by God to Israel?

*King Ahaz is pretending to be holy with the statement that they would not test the Lord by asking for a sign. Nonsense, they always wanted a sign. Their faith was always swaying back and forth. God has the prophet Isaiah tell them there would be a sign for them from the Lord Himself. They had better heed this sign created by the Almighty God. There would be a virgin birth and the child would be a son called Immanuel meaning God with us.)*

**Question:** Why do people try to explain away this prophecy of Christ?



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**Question:** What would you say to defend this truth from God given over 700 years before Jesus was born?

*If you have to explain away the possibility of the miraculous, then you have to explain away the existence of life itself!*

#### Read Isaiah 9:1-7

2. Where would this great light shine? (*Have someone read Matthew 2:1-6. Point out that Persian astrologers were aware of the Jewish interpretation on the Messiah in Micah the Prophet's writings [Micah 5:2] even though they were probably more like new age thinkers.*)
3. Notice that verse 6 once again points to this child that is born FOR US. List the things this child will accomplish.

**Question:** How does the church, Jesus' body on earth, fulfill this role of the everlasting kingdom of righteousness?

*So, we see that in Jesus alone can these prophecies from God find truth and have meaning. Jesus was promised and He came miraculously. Jesus victory and His kingdom was promised and it took place and is taking place miraculously.*

#### Evidences from non-Christian sources:

In A.D. 66, Jews in Palestine revolted against Rome's rule over them. The emperor sent General Vespasian with troops to end the riot. In a 47 day siege the young Jewish men were being slaughtered. The remaining few decided they would commit suicide rather than surrender to the Roman army. One young man didn't take his own life. Instead, Flavius Josephus surrenders. He won favor with Vespasian and was later taken to Rome by General Titus, Vespasian's son, after the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, just as Jesus foretold it would be to the Apostles.



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Josephus began writing the history of Rome, serving as historian for the emperor Domitian, who just happened to later be the most blood thirsty of all emperors against Christians. He was the emperor during the time recorded in Revelation by John. It is important to note that Josephus was not a Christian and would have never knowingly advanced their cause. He just recorded history accurately. It was how he stayed alive and well.

In his book, *Antiquities of the Jews*, (book 18 chapter 3, section 3), which he finished in about A.D. 93, Josephus wrote:

*At this time [the time of Pilate] there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.*

**Question:** Obviously this writing had Rome's stamp of approval, otherwise he would have been dead and the book destroyed. What in this historical record from Rome written around A.D. 93 would add powerful evidence to Jesus' truths?

In another passage from *Antiquity of the Jews*, (book 20, chapter 9, section 1), Josephus revealed how the new high priest of the Jews (Ananus the younger) took advantage of a gap in Roman rule to kill James, the brother of Jesus. It was A.D. 62 and the Roman governor Festus died in office. It was 3 months before his successor, Albinus, could get to Judea to take over. This was the time the Jewish high priest takes advantage of the situation. Josephus writes:

*Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [Ananus the high priest] assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, who name was James, and some others, [or some of his companions], and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.*

**Question:** What in this account of Josephus gives witness to the accuracy of the Bible's facts about Jesus?



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There are 10 known non-Christian writers who mention Jesus within 150 years of His life. There are only 9 non-Christian sources who mention Tiberius over the same 150 years. Some of these could even be considered anti-Christian sources.

- 1) Josephus, the Jewish historian captured and wrote Roman history
- 2) Tacitus, the Roman historian
- 3) Pliny the Younger, a Roman politician
- 4) Phlegon, a freed slave who wrote histories
- 5) Thallus, a 1<sup>st</sup> century historian
- 6) Seutonius, a Roman historian
- 7) Lucian, a Greek satirist
- 8) Celsus, a Roman philosopher
- 9) Mara Bar-Serapion, a private citizen who wrote to his son
- 10) the Jewish Talmud.

Here are some of the facts given by non-Christian references:

- 1) Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar.
- 2) He lived a virtuous life.
- 3) He was a wonder-worker.
- 4) He had a brother named James.
- 5) He was acclaimed to be the Messiah.
- 6) He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
- 7) He was crucified on the eve of the Jewish Passover.
- 8) Darkness and an earthquake occurred when he died.
- 9) His disciples believed he rose from the dead.
- 10) His disciples were willing to die for their belief.
- 11) Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome.
- 12) His disciples denied the Roman gods and worshiped Jesus as God.



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**Evidences of the Resurrected Christ in Scripture:** *Break into 6 groups if possible. Have each group find and discuss the eye-witness accounts and various encounters that transformed people's lives from doubt to belief that never wavered.*

**Matthew**

**Mark**

**Luke**

**John**

**Acts**

**1 Corinthians 15**

**Final Question:** What is the one idea that stands out to you most from this lesson?